Breakthrough environments for inclusive research into race and mental health: Co-creating social justice impact via the #justcare event and social media.

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Abstract

In this article, we describe an inclusive public engagement event held in the ITV television studios with an associated social media programme under the #justcare hashtag. The event explored the intersection of race, mental health and marginalization as a critical issue of social justice, drawing on research evidence and lived experience. This event (led by people of colour for mixed attendance) was designed as a 'breakthrough environment'. The breakthrough environment approach is developed from the integration of community practices and experiences in the African context and Western organization development (OD), and disrupts the traditional structures of event design and knowledge generation to create a psychologically safe space for truly generative conversations around contentious topics. This paper gives an overview of the emerging literature on racial trauma, covers the principles behind the event design and provides a predominantly narrative and visual account of the experience in order to capture the richness in evidence and insight (in contrast with carrying out an analysis). In providing this style of account, the traditional structure of a typical research paper has been disrupted as part of an explicit intent to decolonize knowledge practices to give full and entitled voice to those most impacted by these social justice issues.

**Key words:** diversity; inclusion; mental health; race; social justice

Key messages

- It is necessary to disrupt traditional research methodologies and OD facilitation approaches to allow for knowledge creation to happen in new and participatory ways, and to give space to often excluded voices.

- The breakthrough environment principles used for the design of this participatory event value evidence from a number of sources, with emphasis on the presence of 'expert by experience' accounts of practitioners and those most affected or engaged in the subject matter.

- Creating a psychologically safe, diverse and inclusive space for addressing contentious topics and for working with 'wicked problems' requires a thoughtful intentional approach, and can lead to powerful insights and a commitment to action.

Article structure

This article is presented in a format that, while not unprecedented, is not typical for empirical research. Figure 1 aims to guide the reader through it.

Figure 1: Structure of this paper
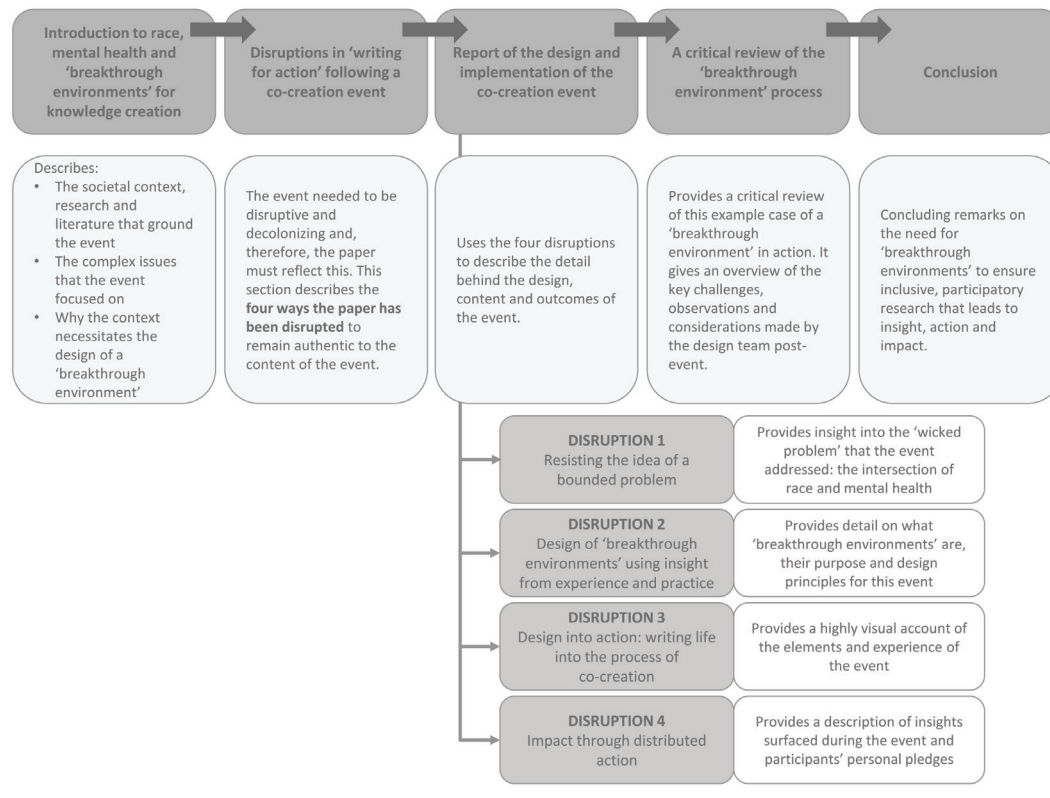
Introduction to race, mental health and breakthrough environments for knowledge co-creation

In the context of broad concerns about mental health provision for black, Asian and minority ethnic people and communities in the United Kingdom (UK) this paper reports on the #justcare event. The event was designed to bring a diverse group of participants into a dialogue about these contentious issues and to encourage public engagement with relevant research and knowledge. We used event design principles (Okonkwo and Owusu, 2016) that we now describe as *breakthrough environments*, referring to a particular form of social activism that uses participation to connect the individual, community and different sources of knowledge and evidence available in order to enable participation and distributed insight and action. The characteristics of breakthrough environments are outlined in the section on event design.

The event was led by Navigate Organisation Ltd, who 'do social change', working in partnership with ITV to focus attention on this important topic and to demonstrate how evidence can be accessed, used and mobilized in meaningful dialogue for social benefit. The designed dialogue concentrated on the question: Why is the act of seeking and accessing mental health services such a problematic experience for people from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities in the UK?

In our design process for this event we were keenly aware of the emphasis on the evidence-based approaches gaining currency for policy decision-making. Evidence-based approaches are described as 'making decisions through the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of four sources of information' (Barends *et al.*, 2014: 4):

1. the critical evaluation of the best available research findings
2. evidence from the local or organizational context
3. practitioner expertise, experience and judgement
4. perspectives of those people who might be affected by any decision.

The first of these, codified research outputs, tends to be seen as the most generalizable and credible, and so dominates the documents produced in support of policy decision-making. The drive to create a simplified and homogeneous narrative is understandable for those making practical decisions in the face of complex issues. However, this pressure can lead to codified sources becoming the front-of-mind evidence, with the potential consequence that the other three sources are marginalized or even overwritten.

Achieving this desired simplicity may silence the inherent diversity that exists when considering any complex issue, and can be experienced as a 'colonizing' knowledge practice; expertise that positions itself 'outside' the problem. Writing about and addressing the problematized group from this perspective is known as 'othering' in the literature on racism (Kinouani, 2015), which can preserve the status quo, albeit unintentionally. The impact of this on individuals has been recognized in the notion of 'intersectionality' (Atewologun *et al.*, 2016), where a single aspect of identity can dominate what is considered relevant to lived experience and so the complexity of identity is erased.

This implicit hierarchy in sources of evidence (where evidence built from the experience of those directly impacted, or from practitioners, is viewed as having less credibility) runs the risk of creating invisibility, voicelessness and disconnection with those closest to the issue. This is a critical concern for the public engagement agenda and also our wider use of knowledge for social change. In the context of the topic of this paper – mental health in black, Asian and minority ethnic communities – such forces also have the potential to re-traumatize individuals who try to speak (Kinouani, 2015).

Breakthrough environments are concerned with decolonizing knowledge practices by giving voice to the *margins and the complexity within*, connecting this with the mainstream (so activating the voices that have often fallen out in the processes of evidence collection and assessment). The design of this event needed to ensure that such marginalized voices were 'entitled to speak' personal truth rather than safe dogma. To help achieve this, the event design drew on insights from the existing work on mental health and ethnicity in the UK (Kalathil *et al.*, 2011; Kinouani, 2015).

While we recognized that it was critical to include existing research evidence in this event, it was positioned as only one source of evidence, rather than the primary source. With this approach we are influenced by the philosophical zeitgeist enabled by the works of Foucault and Bohm, without claiming a deep expertise in the details of their work. Breakthrough environments are infused with the idea of dialogue as a way of entering into inquiry, experience and insight around participants' points of view (Bohm, 1996; Bohm *et al.*, 1991), and where evidence is gathered we are aware that knowledge and power are inextricably linked (Foucault, 1972).

The participative approach used for the event is also consistent with insights emerging from the UK National Wellbeing Programme, launched in 2010 by the UK government, indicating that participation generates well-being benefits, as long as it is well structured, managed and action focused. Approaches that use passive participation, uncontained discussion or do not make any reference to action planning have no such well-being benefits.

The event reported in the remainder of this article was designed to animate experiential evidence and insight, and to share research evidence in a managed dialogue centred on the chosen topic. The event and process address the theory-into-practice objective inherent in the *Research for All* journal: to make research accessible and actionable, to enable participation in generating knowledge and insight, and to 'democratize' both the creation and the use of research.

Disruptions in 'writing for action' following a co-creation event

The public engagement and research mobilization purpose behind the *Research for All* journal requires knowledge to be translated to enable insight and action (Wilde, 2016). As such, the event method did not intend to generate analysed findings, but instead to encourage distributed action; it sought to encourage experiences that create enactable insight that can in turn lead to impact. By 'enactable insight' we mean that each participant can identify what has meaning for them and what action to take based on the insights gained – we elaborate on this definition in the section below on the impact of the event (Disruption 4).

This intent brings some challenges for the production of a journal article: the normal, linear narrative structure of the research paper (problem, literature review, methods, results and conclusion) cannot contain what needs to be written in this case. To capture the evidence and insight that animated this event we have therefore chosen to deliberately disrupt the narrative structure of a typical empirical research paper in four ways:

- **Disruption 1 – Resisting the idea of a bounded problem.** In this case, our work is grounded in the complex social justice issues of race, mental health and marginalization. We are not engaging with a bounded research problem, which would be the norm in a research paper, but instead working with what could be described as a 'wicked problem' (Rittel and Webber, 1973). This is a problem that by definition cannot be fully resolved because it expands and mutates. We do not aim to define or test ideas about the problem, but instead seek to work together in the reality of the problem, to generate meaningful changes.
- **Disruption 2 – Design of breakthrough environments using insights from experience and practice.** The particular topics addressed required us explicitly to open up and give space for voice and the ability to hear difficult things from others. As such, the event design draws on experience of mental health intervention, of working across cultures and of using social movement approaches. As indicated earlier, we describe such an event as a breakthrough environment – an approach that is emerging from practice at the intersection of community and organization development (OD) practices across African and Western countries (Okonkwo and Owusu, 2016).
- **Disruption 3 – Design into action: Writing life into the process of co-creation.** The event design focused on orchestrating a collective and authentic experience and so we consider that this paper must also focus on elaboration of experience,

rather than on what would normally be described as an analysis of findings. Any method that enables real-time participation and inquiry engages with messy, emergent experience; the purpose and point of this article is to do justice to this experience, rather than to give a digested and disembodied analysis. This means that the unfolding of participative inquiry is integral to the paper, rather than hidden from view.

- **Disruption 4 – Impact through distributed insights for action.** As this approach is not designed to generate standard research findings but instead 'enactable insights' for those who participated (either in the room or via the #justcare social media feed that ran in parallel with the event), the paper should be read within this context. The purpose of the event was to generate a desire and ability to act, and so the output from the event is deliberately and intentionally different. The outputs described in the paper are the insights gained and the intended actions each participant indicated they would take following the experience.

The following event report, which forms the main body of the article, uses these four points of disruption to organize our account, and also to provide an exemplar of a different way of writing about knowledge and public engagement.

Resisting the idea of a bounded problem (Disruption 1)

In making race and mental health the focus, and 'entitling' marginalized voices the purpose, of the event, we were deliberately working with intersecting and contentious social justice issues and engaging with the complexity of these wicked problems. The term 'wicked problems' refers to complex issues that defy simple answers or resolutions (Rittel and Webber, 1973), resist traditional problem-solving approaches (Camillus, 2008) and necessitate engagement from diverse perspectives. This particular wicked problem was chosen in recognition that race was perceived to be off the mental health agenda. At the time of this event in 2015, there were concerns about the nature of health care provided (Fernando, 2014) and about wider social contexts, where multifaceted manifestations of racism have been identified as causing mental distress.

Alongside the evidence of increased reporting of hate crime and racist abuse (Sherwood *et al.*, 2016), there has been a growing academic literature on racial trauma, which identifies the existence of a race-based traumatic stress experience (Carter and Forsyth, 2009). The primary cause identified is the accumulated day-to-day experiences of discrimination and disadvantage, described as 'micro-aggressions' in this literature. The experience of micro-aggressions has well-documented negative personal and social consequences. Effects identified include increased vigilance, increased sensitivity to threat and a narrowing sense of time. The consequence of these effects is increased depression and mental ill health in individuals, and a reduced capacity to function in social contexts due to the extra load of vigilance and managing threat (Turner and Richardson, 2016). These experiences have also been implicated in serious negative mental health outcomes, including increased suicide risk (O'Keefe *et al.*, 2015).

By activating the intersection between the individual and social context (often described as 'the collective' in African community development parlance, especially within social activism work) we moved the dialogue away from a frame that located mental ill health in an individual body/mind, and instead located the experience of psychological distress and access to help in its social context/community. This is in keeping with the increasing evidence that working with social factors is critical

in understanding and addressing the causes and consequence of mental distress (Smail, 2005; Division of Clinical Psychology, 2013). In therapeutic contexts this has been expressed as a change in question from 'what is wrong with me?' to 'what has happened to me?', and so represents a shift that brings attention to socially generated trauma and recovery, rather than to biological dysfunction that gives primary attention to diagnosis and cure at an individual level.

The literature on racial trauma emphasizes the need for specific approaches to recovery (Bryant-Davis and Ocampo, 2006; Comas-Díaz, 2016; Hardy, 2013). This led us to position the trauma and distress from everyday events as central to the event design. Being left out or marginalized is inherently damaging to mental health, requiring us to engage directly with racism as a critical source of mental distress for black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. Engaging directly with such unbounded and intersecting problems, and making space for marginalized voices to express the trauma caused by living these realities, had direct implications for our design and hosting approach (outlined in the next section). Both needed to address the potential for harm by creating a psychologically safe and empowering space. Unlike other research approaches that distinguish between researcher and subject, we were actively aware that we (both hosts and participants) could not operate as outsiders to this lived reality but needed to be engaged with it, and we had to ensure that our design was informed by knowledge of participation, inclusion and recovery.

Design of breakthrough environments using insights from experience and practice (Disruption 2)

This section is in two parts. The first part gives a general introduction to breakthrough environments and what this idea means for event design in general and for this event in particular. The second part outlines the specific design decisions in relation to the event.

The origin and relevance of breakthrough environments

For the design of this event, we worked with the concept of breakthrough environments. Breakthrough environments as an approach was developed out of the intersecting experiences of life, identity and practice spanning two continents (Okonkwo and Owusu, 2016). In taking Western-style OD practices into an African setting, for work across communities in different African countries, a new integrated approach was necessary – one that drew on a variety of African community practices that are inherently more dialogic, participative and based in service and/or collective leadership (Gilpin-Jackson, 2014). Breakthrough environments, both in name and process, also emerged in response to the dimensions of colonization and the reality of marginalization and oppression present in the African context. This makes the approach very relevant to the subject of the #justcare event, with this being the first time such a design approach was used explicitly for an event with participants from the African diaspora.

Previously, the authors have used breakthrough environments in community development and social activism facilitation with a number of organizations, such as with Africa 2.0, a pan-African civil society organization (www.africa2point0.org), to integrate leaders across different African countries into a cohesive social movement, and in support of the work of the Astraea Foundation, an LGTBQI grant-making organization (www.astraeafoundation.org), amplifying Kenyan and South African

activists' voices and work by connecting them with technologists, communication and media specialists. Working with social identity (Haslam, 2014) in this reflexive fashion is having an increasing impact on the nature of OD practice (Zaldivar *et al.*, 2016). With this event, it was our intention to cultivate the breakthrough environment concept further through community development, and to demonstrate its relevance to challenges faced in Western and global settings. (There is more about this in the critical review section.)

In recognition of the culturally diverse origin of breakthrough environments, this event relied upon contributors from a number of different ethnic backgrounds; the event designers, from and based in Africa (representing Mozambique, Ghana and Nigeria), worked directly with the host, speakers and facilitators based in the UK (each with identity affiliations across various EMEAA (Europe, Middle East, Asia and Africa) countries and the Caribbean. We are deeply grateful to the facilitators that gave their time to support this process (see the acknowledgements at the end of the article).

The purpose of breakthrough environments can be expressed in two ways:

- **To decolonize existing structures, knowledge, practices and processes for new insights**. In addressing social justice issues, it is important to take a broad view of the potentially oppressive structures that surround the topic. This means asking questions such as: What restrictions are created by using a linear and bounded approach with set outcomes? What pressure does rigid timing create? Which voices are missing from this account and how might we need to build language around voices that are not heard? How does information flow? What information is seen as having authority and how can we disrupt this? What is evidence and how are the ways we collect, analyse and document evidence incomplete?
- **To make explicit and work with the connection between each individual and the community/collective for meaningful action**. As we have mentioned above, core to our event was maintaining the balance between individual expressions and their firm grounding in a societal context. Breakthrough environments are designed to bring the relationship inherent in 'me and the group' to the foreground, without losing what is distinctive about each part of this relationship. Working in this way also unlocks the potential and possibility for individual and/or collective action after the event.

The design of a breakthrough environment is grounded in the following principles:

1. generative dialogue is at the core of the gathering
2. the topics addressed are genuinely important to the participants
3. a safe and conducive space must be created
4. hosts and facilitators are brokers of this safe dialogic process
5. the event must be porous and extend beyond the room.

The value and intent of these principles are discussed in more detail in the critical review later in this paper.

How we approached design

The invitation to participate in the creation of knowledge and insight about matters of racism and mental health was grounded in the above purpose and principles, in order to invite previously unheard perspectives into a space to co-create a new narrative and

avoid a 'bolt on' approach to race that is satisfied merely with having race 'back on the agenda'.

In breakthrough environments, conversation, both virtual and in person, is a key tool for generating insight and bringing about action. To achieve true dialogue we are required to balance time to listen with time to speak (Isaacs, 1999). For this breakthrough environment, that meant using a conversational structure that included evidence from research and from personal stories interspersed with dialogue around open questions. This approach enabled us to activate the sense of learning in community and to take 'the energy of our differences and channel it towards something that has never been created before' (Isaacs, 1999: 18).

As the evidence from lived experience of self in community was so critical to achieving impact, it needed to be built on choice to participate (or not), and attendance was by invitation and agreement. In practice, this meant paying particular attention to the recruitment of participants. In contrast to a traditional research approach, this required a wide marketing outreach strategy that could be defined as 'all are welcome'. The 60 participants self-selected and committed (pointing to principle 2 above), either through paying for a ticket at a nominal price or applying for a pro bono funded space. This active commitment ensured we had no dropouts and the deliberate exchange encouraged autonomy of choice for those attending and activated the importance of gifting that was critical to achieve the sense of working in community that governed the event. Self-selection by participants who were personally aware and connected to the subject gave us the confidence to tackle the challenging aspects of the issue. Further, the result of this process was a great diversity of participants, with particular emphasis on representation of marginalized voices. One-third of participants were white and two-thirds were people of colour, from across sectors (including media and scriptwriters, public servants from both prisons and the police service, community mental health institutions and charities, black, Asian and minority ethnic community groups, activists and students, as well as individuals with a keen interest from their own experience and connection with the topic), allowing the event to bring to life intersectionality in action. In addition, the event was black-led, meaning that hosts, facilitators and speakers were intrinsically engaged in the topic, yet in an effort to equalize they were not positioned as experts (but rather as bringing a provocation to catalyse dialogue) and rejoined the plenary as active participants before and after their interventions.

Psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), and its management throughout the event, needed to be suitable for a culturally mixed audience and the porous nature of a breakthrough environment (for example, via social media). Psychological safety does not mean that difficult topics are avoided. On the contrary, it refers to a particular quality of 'intimacy' that means that difficult topics can be raised, heard and worked with. The space must allow for exploration of all aspects of the topic, including honouring the contentious and very real distress that participants may bring. This is subtly distinct from appreciative approaches (Cooperrider *et al.*, 2001) that focus on positive experiences or strengths as the enabler of action. Instead, the intent is to lean safely into what is difficult by creating a social context or community where each individual feels safe to take personal risk about what is shared with others.

> **Box 1: Designing a safe space**
>
> The design of a safe and conducive space requires attention to the following:
>
> - the construction of authority (hosting, facilitation, sponsorship) that models decolonization of knowledge practices and encourages participation and inclusive entitlement to speak
> - modelling direct and calm engagement with difficult topics by hosts and facilitators and through a multitude of media that help participants to access different ways of speaking and listening
> - enabling participants to bring their *full selves* to the interaction – both in terms of feeling able to give expression to the various aspects of their identity (for example, by using Oriki, as outlined in the next section) and by acknowledging all participants as *experts by experience* who have something crucial to share (regardless of their formal role).

The quality, tone and presence of the host is critical here and we explore this in more detail in the critical review at the end of this paper.

It is easy for such dialogues, with diverse participation, to become centred on tackling what is described as 'white fragility' (DiAngelo, 2011), the defensive stance often exhibited by white communities when faced with racial stress. To ensure the psychological safety needed for constructive dialogue, our approach needed instead to concentrate on affirming black, Asian and minority ethnic voices and experiences and to create the entitlement to speak truth to a mixed community. It was also critical that we created a structure and process for clear expression and thoughtful listening without unintentionally triggering processes that could contribute to racial trauma. This integrates work being done around 'healing justice', such as the work of Harriet's Apothecary (www.harrietsapothecary.com), that creates healing spaces for and led by people of colour. This includes spaces for social justice activists, which are curated to support self-care, resilience and the healing of trauma. This focus was expressed in the #justcare header used as an expression of the subject at hand (building justice and recovery from racial trauma into the narrative of mental health provision). While we deeply recognize the need for safe spaces for specific groups free of the social context that can be the source of trauma, the intent in this case was to work directly with the individual in community/social context as a form of safe parrhesia (speaking truth to power). There are few spaces where such complex conversations across diverse groups are enabled, yet for mental health provision to be relevant to, and effective for, all the communities served, such conversations must be integral to the design of solutions moving forward.

The #justcare theme was also the organizing hashtag for the conversation on social media that extended the experience of the event beyond the walls of the room and lent further visibility and endorsement to what was being voiced.

While the design principles remain for all breakthrough environments, there were some practical design decisions that were made for the #justcare event in particular.

Design choices

1. Doing what is needed: Knowledge production and healing

The event design necessitated learning explicitly from the first six of the eight steps identified by Hardy (2013) that are relevant to healing racial trauma:

- affirmation and acknowledgement of the impact of racism and the need for a place to talk safely about this
- creation of space for race across communities by giving encouragement to talk openly about experiences related to race
- racial storytelling where thoughtful and emotional accounts of such experiences can be shared and wounds acknowledged
- validation of the inherent value of those who have been wounded
- naming racial trauma and the reality of lived experience
- location of the problem in the context and not the self.

These are consistent with the principles of breakthrough environments, and through building this understanding into the design we could extend our work to model a process that aligns with 'healing'. This contributed to the creation of psychologically safe space, and to participants' ability to engage meaningfully with the topic.

2. Working with the framing effect

To apply these insights it was necessary to give detailed attention to the frame set for the event. There is a considerable literature on framing bias that is relevant to this design concern (Wilde, 2016). The 'edges' of the event, or indeed any conversation, are critical, and so the opening and welcome phase in such an event creates the frame that becomes the stepping off point for dialogue. If this phase is misdirected, the dialogue will not unfold in the intended direction. Therefore, the design decision was made to start directly and uncompromisingly with a step into the reality of racism.

The opening line from the host was 'can an event about race and mental health avoid the topic of racism?' This was quickly followed by the use of a video by hip-hop artist Akala (Akala *et al.*, 2015) on everyday racism and micro-aggressions. To contain and ground this potentially triggering material, this was immediately followed up with the use of the Oriki method (Okonkwo, 2010), a practice based in the Nigerian Yoruba tradition of writing praise poetry to affirm each individual, their strengths and character, and what they bring to the community. Creating this container for dialogue (Bushe, 2013), and framing what was to come, was reinforced by some explicit collective agreements (based on MG Taylor's Axioms for Releasing Group Genius; see Taylor, 1997) for dialogue developed and/or affirmed by participants, which included:

- respect where people are coming from and what they share
- discovering that you do not know something is the first step to knowing it
- everything that someone tells you is true – they are reporting their experience of reality
- in every adverse condition, there are hundreds of good solutions and we need all the wisdom in the room.

3. Appointment of host and facilitators

Breakthrough environments require highly skilled facilitation from the event host, and the appointment of Derek Tuitt was a significant symbolic act that ensured black leadership for the event. The host has a track record of skilled direction of generative dialogue and community engagement and our facilitators and social media moderators (who gifted their time to support this process) were critical for the success of the event. (This is addressed in more detail in the critical review section.)

4. Balancing the content and delivery mechanism

In the interests of decolonizing knowledge, it was necessary to resist the expert talk and panel debate format, without losing the benefits that come from the different types of contribution to knowledge and understanding. We worked with four different aspects of knowledge work: (1) academic – systematic; (2) activist – practice; (3) intimate lived experience; and (4) community dialogue. In practice, these four levels of knowledge work were organized around two main content modules (named *Provocations*, as they were designed to catalyse dialogue and the creation of insight). These were interspersed with participant dialogues and intimate accounts of lived experience. Finally, a panel of media and communications practitioners brought to light the ways in which storytelling and visibility are intertwined with the topic. These shifts in pace and content are important in maintaining participation and energy.

To illustrate how the Provocations came to life, the sample design in Box 2 demonstrates the key elements included in these content modules:

> ## Box 2: Provocation – 'Race, culture and the service relationship'
>
> This provocation opened with Dr Suman Fernando providing a rich evidence-base, which acted as a springboard for dialogue for the remainder of the event. As a psychiatrist and thought leader in the area of race, culture and mental health, he talked about the fact that people of colour are being sectioned, medicated, detained and locked away more than ever, instead of being treated for mental ill health. The insight around fractured identities and communities was further corroborated by the contribution of speaker Tony Warner, the founder of Black History Walks, who has developed innovative approaches to mental health intervention using Black history, narrative and culture. This module was brought to a close with the first intimate conversation between the host and Natasha Benjamin, the founder of Free Your Mind, speaking about her personal journey through mental ill health to recovery, and the distress she experienced in seeking and receiving help. The host skilfully guided the interview in a style reminiscent of public therapy. This same design approach was used for the media panel module and the module on building inclusive organizations.

5. Enabling the dialogue to extend beyond the room

Just as the opening frames the conversation, the way such an event closes either enables or disables the transfer of the experience. To encourage positive transfer, the day closed with a pledging process. This took the form of personal reflection time, and then a request to all participants to consider what action they would take in their own domain from the insights and understanding gained from participation. These pledges are shown in the section on impacts (Disruption 4).

The design approach also gave attention to the orchestration of an active social media stream running in parallel with the event, encouraging voice and reflection, both from those inside and those outside the room. This online Twitter conversation was moderated remotely, under the hashtag #justcare, to allow the dialogue to leak out of the room as it unfolded and after the event. This article acts as the final part of the strategy to make real the 'porous nature' of this as a breakthrough environment, by codifying both the content and process of the event in a report format.

Design into action: Writing life into the process of co-creation (Disruption 3)

> I am the disruptive leader.
> I am the one who does meaningful effective change.
> I am the one who very politely does not shut up.
> I ask the difficult questions.
> My consciousness is awake and I recognise shared value.
>
> (Example of Oriki praise poetry, created by host Derek Tuitt)

This event was not a research method but instead a process to enable real-time participation and inquiry using available codified knowledge, activist know-how and lived experience. We distinguish this process from other real-time methods, such as focus groups or interviews (which share the conversational, participatory element of breakthrough environments), as these are not based in communal, generative dialogue. As research methods, they position the 'researcher' as separate from the interaction, and this external party assembles and distils the generated outputs. In our process, the focus is on a community experience and it is only within this space that collective insights are generated. (This is discussed in more detail in the critical review section.) It is the 'messy' experience of the method that is the purpose and point of this article. In reporting on this, the unfolding of the participative inquiry is the central part of the paper, rather than being hidden from view. Therefore, this section includes a predominantly visual record of the proceedings.

Orikis

The process of writing personal Orikis (Okonkwo, 2010) in the room (as part of the framing and opening of the event described above) was a creative and engaging activity. Participants were animated and in conversation, tapping into their personalities for ways to express their identities authentically. There is an example of the host's Oriki at the start of this section, and we continued to collect Orikis on an online platform in the month that followed. Figure 2 shows a snapshot of some of the Orikis gathered.
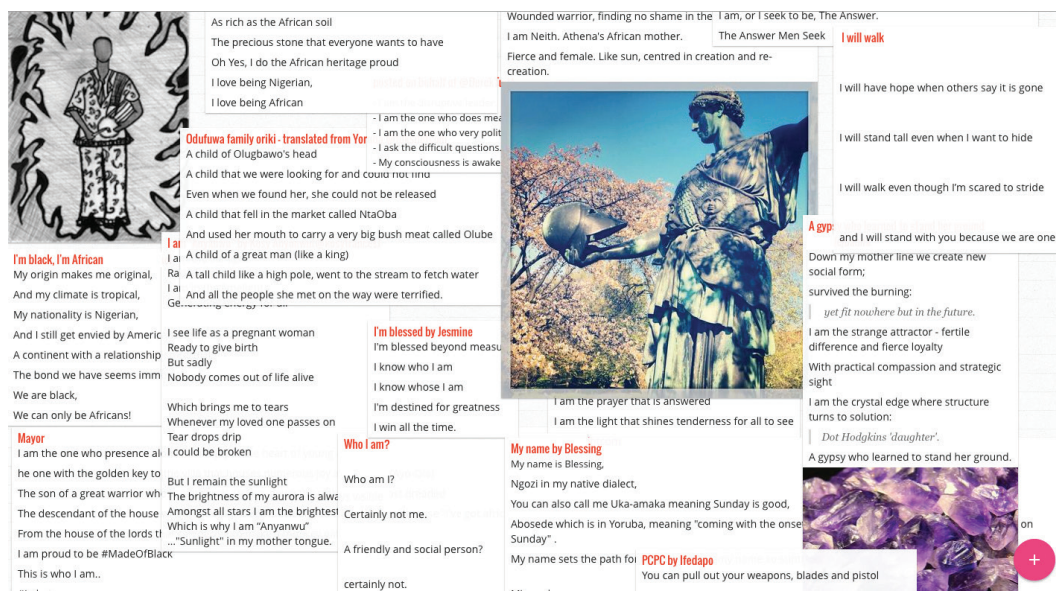
Figure 2: Orikis

Photo and video documentation

A film and photography crew documented the whole event programme, capturing video, photographs and a number of vox pop interviews with attendees (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Photographic record of the event

Twitter conversation on #justcare

Listed below are examples of the online engagement that was created on social media. Having a social media stream integrated into event design not only adds to the multilayered approach to documenting conversations, but also models inclusion, transparency and listening as values integral to the success of this type of event and explicitly addresses the issues of exclusion and invisibility. Some Twitter comments about the event included:

- 28% of #NHS #doctors r black & #minority ethnic but 3% of medical directors r black & minority ethnic
- Yvonne Coghill OBE superb talk regarding NHS inequalities; stark and sober commentary
- The people making the NHS policies are not representing the people that use the #NHS how will you influence this @EdMilliband_MP
- Yvonne Coghill the NHS Race Equality Standard – 'being black dominates your health in white dominated economies'
- I agree. Open Dialogue is an exciting new approach in mental health
- Great to be at a strongly BAME-led [black, Asian and minority ethnic] MH [mental health] event. There's not enough of this at national level
- Pleased to follow the #justcare discussion – the provision of health services for BME patients & how it can be improved

- 'When they talk about women on boards what they're really talking about is rich white women' Doyin Atewologun on intersectionality
- Intersectionality. I also see this as a key concept
- Really enthralling discussion about the pros & cons of diagnosis. Yvonne Coghill calls for bold new ways forward
- Labelling (diagnosis) suits the system but looking to do things 'boldly and differently' – by not labelling ppl, as stigma sticks
- Discussion about MH labels and the 'recovery' being in a person's own hands @ NavitageO @ITV

Capturing of participant insights and feedback

The next section (Disruption 4) elaborates the insights and actions that were captured through the facilitation process. During the event these insights were condensed into simple and visual word clouds (see Figure 4), which were then fed into the Twitter traffic and back to the room. These word clouds were also used to gather post-event feedback, both with an online survey and via email – they act as a simple trigger for participants on the key themes of conversations.

Figure 4: Word clouds

Impact through distributed insights for action (Disruption 4)

For this event, it was important to situate the issues of discrimination and mental ill health outside of the individual and instead locate them in the social context, without leaving participants powerless to act. A sense of possibility must be generated around the agency and unique resources available to each participant in responding to these issues. The impact of this event was in enabling meaningful community-produced enactable insights to emerge.

The success of the process is measured by its ability to bring about enactable insights. Through intentional design and skilful hosting, participants navigate difficult topics and tensions, and explore numerous intersections through dialogue. Importantly, the process allows articulation (and re-articulation) and convergence of contributions to the point where an insight is reflected back and validated by the community. This moment is powerfully felt, and its value is demonstrated by participants' commitment and willingness to identify consequent action. These insight become enactable because participants feel able to *do something* after the event; the insight emerges in community but can be applied individually in different contexts post-event.

For this event, the feedback from the participants indicated that the design and delivery of the process led to a meaningful experience that would enable impact that extended beyond the end of the event. Overall, participants reported that the event was a good use of their time, that it allowed them to tackle topics that are not addressed enough and that it filled a gap in existing events and conferences, both because of the topics addressed and because of the way the event was managed. In what follows, evidence of impact is given in two parts:

1. the insights: captured by facilitators as they were uncovered through the provocation and dialogic process of the event
2. the personal pledges: evidence of commitment to action that participants shared at the end of the event.

Distributed insights generated through participant dialogue

Black leadership matters

The dialogue throughout the event reinforced the importance of black leadership in enabling productive dialogue and problem-solving around contested and potentially socially divisive topics, and was experienced positively by all groups in the audience, primarily because it was strategic and directed to the framing, containing and policy definition work required. In addition, 'black leadership in vulnerability', evidenced through black role models expressing distress, recovery and understanding (amplified through the content of the media panel) was identified as helping to dismantle the stereotypes around 'strength', both about the black community and within the black community. It was identified that black men and women expressing vulnerability is critical to enable clearer articulation of the mental health service needs for diverse communities. Much of the dialogue explored the destructive interaction of the responses of the health and judicial systems to mental distress for black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, and specifically the stereotyped reaction to black men is a critical concern for those carrying the trauma from stereotypes and stigma that exists at the intersection of race and mental health disability.

The current fracture lines existing in this issue mean that tinkering with existing health-care provision is not the solution

There was a sense of urgency expressed about addressing the intersection of race and mental distress and a recognition that a complex set of social dynamics is involved. The understanding generated through dialogue and being in community, centred on an experience that was articulated as 'feeling fractured'. These fracture lines were identified around social identity, diagnosis, credible knowledge and community connection. In particular, the acts of seeking and then accessing help were seen as having the potential to compromise social identity, and hence social support and community connections, for members of marginalized groups.

A lack of awareness of racism as a cause of mental ill health

The causes and manifestations of mental distress in the different communities was identified as a critical contributor to the sense of fracture. Working with the lived experience of racist micro-aggressions is a significant factor in whether a helping relationship is productive or not. It is not clear that there is sufficient knowledge or expertise in the mainstream therapeutic provision to work effectively with these factors. Recovery from mental distress must work with the substantial social drivers of well-being (and therefore, also with the causes of racial trauma). The failure to consider the cultural, the social and the narrative aspects of identity leads to a lack of meaningful provision for diverse communities. In particular, emphasis was put on the need to address issues related to discharge from acute care and reintegration into community.

Social support needs to be relevant to the person and community

It was identified that accounts of what would be considered relevant social support in mainstream rhetoric about mental health is homogenized around assumed ways of living, and so can be marginalizing. Participants noted the need to understand in more detail what aspects of social support are most helpful for awareness, access and recovery for members of diverse communities. Specifically, in this dialogue there was a reference to the need to address spirituality and community, including the application of doctrine, the interpretation of faith and the flexibility that faith-based or community-based social support offer.

Diagnosis is damaging

The dialogue explored the positive impact of personal narrative and collective heritage in support and recovery. It also identified that diagnosis can overwrite a more helpful narrative and therefore needs to lose its power. Diagnosis was identified as functioning as the primary act of stigmatization and as disruptive of personal meaning-making. The act of diagnosis can contribute to fracture, and so generate a dependency relationship centred on expertise rather than on help. The damage done to identity by diagnosis, and to social support by a sense of fracture, is problematic for prognosis, as both these psychosocial factors (positive identity and social support) are heavily implicated in recovery.

Micro-aggressions and the need for attention to cultural work–life balance

Workplaces were identified as a significant shared community that can either exacerbate or mitigate mental distress. For black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, workplaces can act as a major source of exclusion and micro-aggressions (and so

contribute to the mental health crisis for our communities). It was indicated that this reality is not fully engaged with in the current diversity and inclusion rhetoric. Through this dialogue, the exploration of inclusion practices in complex workplaces – given the debilitating impact of micro-aggressions – led to an emerging idea of cultural work–life balance, based upon the recognition that we all belong to a wide array of different communities, which can be mutually reinforcing or (if in tension) can contribute to identity fracture.

Decolonize the curriculum for service providers

There is the potential to build a culturally sensitive and much more widely informed curriculum for the development of health-care professionals (and also for management students). This requisite diversity was seen as essential for the development of distinctive and innovative approaches in mental health, helping make services relevant to the wide range of manifestations of mental distress across the diverse communities in the UK.

Personal pledges for ownership of action

The pledging process at the end of the event was focused on responding to these emerging insights, and committing to an individual action that is possible from each participant's sphere of influence. Figure 5 shows some examples of participant pledges.

Figure 5: Participant pledges
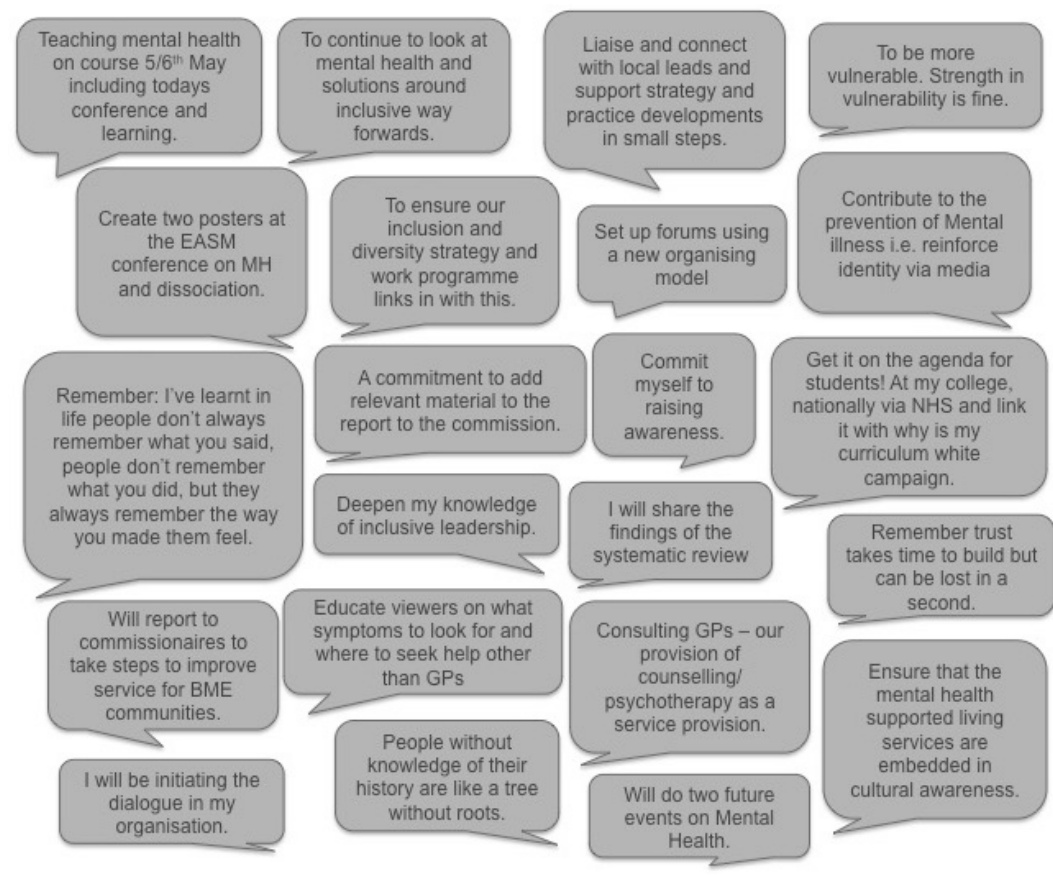
A critical review of the 'breakthrough environment' process

We have described breakthrough environments as a design practice that generates a bespoke participatory process (as distinct from a traditional research methodology) and have situated its origin in practice, experience and exploration at the intersection of Western and African intervention technology. In relation to the issue addressed in the #justcare event, this process offered a powerful alternative for addressing the complexity of these social justice issues. This event is one successful test case of applying the principles to a wicked problem, and it is our intention to address further such issues, in community. Without attempting to reduce this experiential process to a step-by-step methodology, this section seeks to unpack some key challenges, observations and considerations about breakthrough environments.

What challenges did we face in the design and execution of this event?

Managing different value sets

Given the open recruitment of participants and the intersecting topic, the event drew a variety of participants from different spheres of life. This inevitably creates a tension between individual values and intentions, for example between those representing the corporate world, the media and community activists. This tension was defused through the two intimate conversations that brought to light the inherent connectedness of seemingly disparate perspectives. By hearing a senior corporate executive describe being personally impacted by family distress in relation to mental health, or uncovering how a storyline on a popular television programme was the trigger for an activist to found their organization, cross-cutting commonalities become clear.

Encouraging visibility while honouring confidentiality

To encourage visibility and openness (to disrupt the usual hidden and marginalized voices surrounding this topic) we included a media panel, attendance by journalists, a documenting crew (video and photography) and a live Twitter stream. This raised considerations of confidentiality and consent. It was necessary to explicitly make people aware of these dimensions, as well as to allow anyone uncomfortable with the disclosure to opt out. In collating this report, we have maintained the anonymity of Twitter contributors to ensure the ethical integrity of our evidence. This follows guidelines on social media as research evidence, such as those produced by researchers at the University of Aberdeen (Townsend and Wallace, 2016), while still including the voices that contributed to the online conversation.

A further decision was made to position the role of media as one of the key lenses through which participants were invited to engage with the topic. The attention, interest and focus on such a suppressed topic were a powerful recognition of the importance of the subject. In the context of this report, this diversity of exposure also adds an innovative way of documenting and codifying evidence, as distinct from the traditional methods that are often less accessible to the very 'research subjects' that are most affected by the evidence.

What made this breakthrough environment distinctive?

The process was community-led and community-validated

We have explored the intention to democratize knowledge and research, but more broadly – and intrinsic to the event as a whole – this breakthrough environment was democratic in nature. All contributors and participants were active in generating the enacted insights we describe above, and all voices were explicitly given equal weighting. For example, prominence was given to collective insight that is co-created, explored and validated in real-time during the event; the community owns this evidence. This is in contrast to the usual post-event distillation and evaluation done by a researcher who is positioned as objective and outside the community.

The topic is powerful precisely because it is complex

It is the intersecting, unbounded nature of the topic that holds the attention of participants because it resonates with the lived human experience. Rather than shying away from this, or attempting to crystallize a more concise problem statement, we used the tapestry of interlocking conversation threads to fuel individuals' participation with a topic of collective importance.

What other considerations should be taken into account?

The skilful role of the host of any breakthrough environment is important, particularly where contentious subjects are being addressed by a diverse group. We have talked about creating a container for dialogue and a psychologically safe space for expression; it is the host, with their ability to 'hold the space' who facilitates this. We define holding space as the observable ability to bring to the surface, to listen to, to contain and to translate tensions that are brought up, in a way that participants experience as safe and generative, rather than risky and destructive. Without the host, interventions such as these dialogues have the potential to be harmful and re-traumatizing. Psychological safety for insight and power to act is generated from staying and working with what is difficult, not from remaining in what is comfortable.

Given the lived experiences that participants were bringing into the space in relation to the topic, tension and difference was inevitable, which was the reason for the selection of a host who embodies intersectionality, works at the boundaries of cultures and can honour any identity that was represented at the event. Further, despite the difference in role between the host and participants, the host was perceived as part of the community of participants and was not positioned as having power over participants. Many of the skills of the host are trainable (for example, active listening) but they do not constitute a methodology that can be used off the shelf. There is a more subtle point about effective hosting: although the intersectional aspects can be replicated, impactful facilitation is about the host's intrinsic way of being in the world, and how that is used to mirror and empower the community of participants.

What are the potential implications for wider adoption of the breakthrough environment principles and approach?

The design skills needed to structure such an event, and the deep dialogic skills needed to be able to safely host it, mean that the breakthrough environment approach should not be used lightly in the development of these skills. However, more broadly these skills are increasingly being taught and seen as a valuable part of organization

development practice. In this context, it is seen as a key to research and intervention in organizations to support change and well-being, and there is scope for the same types of skills to be developed by the qualitative research practitioner. By definition, breakthrough environments encourage diversity and the embracing of intersectionality. (This was especially the case in this instance, given the focus of the event.) This is in line with emerging conversations in the strategic organization development field around inclusion and intersectionality in the representation of leadership. Both these areas present an opportunity for the research community to attend to matters of equality and social justice in support of these developments.

Conclusion

We have explored how traditional approaches to research and evidence can exclude black, Asian and minority ethnic voices. This is significant when the issue is race discrimination and mental health, because it means that the body of knowledge that exists for policy or practice is not rich enough to be truly representative or useful. This absence or erasure also has the potential to add further to experiences of trauma and invisibility. At the core of the #justcare event was the intent to address these two contentious and socially divisive issues directly and safely. This event, and breakthrough environments in general, disrupt both traditional research methodologies and OD facilitation approaches, to allow for knowledge creation to happen in new and participatory ways. To engage effectively with the chosen question, a number of bespoke design decisions were explicitly made to create a breakthrough environment that offered a psychologically safe space enabling all participants (both those leading provocations and those nominally attending as participants) to surface enactable insights about race and mental ill health. To mirror this shift, the traditional structure of a research report has also been disrupted in this paper. We have focused on bringing to life the experience of the event in a way that maintains the living nature of the evidence that was generated and then used by participants afterwards. By making an explicit effort to decolonize knowledge practices in all our design, facilitation and documentation considerations, we were able to create a space for new voices, new insight and new action.

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